

Audit Commission milestone follows satisfaction report

The **social housing sector** passed a **significant milestone** in June when the **100th Audit Commission inspection** of an ALMO took place. **Cumbrian ALMO South Lakes Housing** was awarded a **'good' two-star rating**, continuing its access to **£21m Decent Homes funding**.

The Audit Commission report on South Lakes Housing praised the organisation for its understanding of customer requirements and for involving them in decision making. It added that it was providing a good service with 'excellent' prospects for improvement.

The report came hot on the heels of a recent Ipsos MORI survey, Housing Frontiers, which assessed tenant satisfaction in local authority-managed housing for 2006/7. Three of the top four best performing authorities and eight of the top 11 were ALMO-managed, as were nine of the top 12 most improving landlords.

For the first time, the survey incorporated a weighting system which takes economic, social, and geographic differences into account in order to create an extremely accurate picture of the national social housing landscape. The fact that ALMOs operate in some of the most challenging and deprived areas of the country further underlines the scale of their achievements. In the minority of ALMOs with the lowest rating, improvements have been made since the survey was carried out.

NFA Chair Dennis Rees says the milestone

inspection and the report provide a compelling validation of the ALMO model. "Key to these successes is the core principle that tenants must be truly involved in real decision-making about the management of their homes. They know what is needed in their homes and neighbourhoods and make sound judgements on difficult choices that improve not only their homes and lives but the environments of millions of tenants."

He added: "The ALMO movement has come a long way in a very short space of time. Six years since their inception, 68 ALMOs and two aspirant ALMOs are now managing and improving more than one million council homes, or more than half of all council housing. Because the inspection process is ongoing, these results show that ALMOs continue to improve as the bar for standards is constantly raised."



Tenant satisfaction

ALMOs in ACTION


National Federation of ALMOs
 championing better homes and communities



Nine-year old Brooke Neesom helps build a scarecrow on the John O'Gaunts estate in Leeds

Sustainable commitment from Keepmoat

Keepmoat, through its group companies **Frank Haslam Milan** and **Bramall Construction**, is working with a number of partners across the North and Midlands, including **20 ALMOs**, to help deliver **over 40,000 Decent Homes a year**.



environmentally-friendly to ensure that we reduce carbon emissions and protect our future. We are therefore delighted to have been involved in the construction of England's first certified Sustainable Code Level 4 houses and we hope that they will be the first of many that we are involved in across the country."

As well as supporting clients with their drive to develop zero carbon homes, Keepmoat is successfully taking the sustainability message from the margins into the mainstream. It is creating a sustainable strategy that is based on thorough reviews of its environmental impacts to help reduce the group's carbon footprint.

Keepmoat's Director of Sustainable Development, Dane Elliott, says: "The challenge of sustainability is one for everyone, for individuals, consumers and especially for business. We are leaving no stone unturned in our drive to be one of the leading housing and construction companies in sustainable development, while at the same time reducing our own carbon footprint and adverse environmental impacts."

In February they handed over two Sustainable Code Level 4 houses to their partner Pennine Housing. These were part of an 82-home scheme in Illingworth, near Halifax. Under the Sustainable Code, these homes will save future residents money on energy and heating bills, as well as reducing carbon emissions by 54 per cent compared to a traditional home.

All this is achieved through unique features such as solar panels; improved U values on walls; glazing; external doors and loft space to prevent energy loss. The properties are also fitted with an exhaust air heat pump which converts the energy in dirty air into useful energy to heat domestic hot water and radiators.

Photovoltaics were fitted to produce electrical energy – the surplus electricity from these is then fed back into the national grid to create a financial rebate for the occupier.

Neil Baxter, Managing Director of Bramall Construction, said: "We recognise that new homes need to be both economically- and



David Blunt, CEO

In addition to this, Keepmoat's delivery companies are also helping their clients to create desirable neighbourhoods by building

new homes for rent on a number of mixed tenure sites. But not at the expense of the environment.

There is no quick fix to sustainable regeneration, but as the government's drive for creating sustainable homes and reducing their environmental impact becomes ever more prevalent, Keepmoat is constantly looking at different ways to deliver greener homes whilst reducing costs.

In fact, Bramall Construction, a Keepmoat company, has become the first building contractor in England to be awarded a Code for Sustainable Homes certificate at Level 4.

Hello

and welcome to the eighth issue of **ALMOs In Action**. After a highly successful AGM and well-attended awards ceremony in May, the 100th Audit Commission inspection of an ALMO was a moment for reflection on the last six years (see back page).

This edition features an interesting selection of stories which touch upon topics of enduring relevance to the ALMO sector – care of the elderly; the future of ALMOs as landlord; rent payment and the financial health of tenants.



NFA Chair Dennis Rees

The message, as ever, is this: with their perennial focus on tenants and real lives rather than just bricks and mortar, ALMOs continue to evolve and adapt to a changing world. The future looks bright.

The 2008 NFA Awards

Passion, innovation and commitment were the watchwords at the 2008 NFA Awards, held in York in May.

Almost 300 ALMO representatives attended an impressive ceremony hosted by Nik Wood, presenter of BBC TV's Working Lunch. In a filmed address, the Rt Hon Iain Wright MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, praised the work of the ALMO movement, saying it was an important part of both future housing provision and community development.

Over 200 entries were received for the seven award categories.

The Winners

Most Effective Partnership Project
Brent Housing Partnership – collaborations on antisocial behaviour

Most Innovative Project
Colchester Borough Homes – Extra-Care Schemes

ALMO Team Member of the Year
Carl Willis – Derby Homes

Best Use of Communication
The Gateshead Housing Company – rent arrears campaign

Board Member of the Year
Valerie Schneider – Nottingham City Homes

Best Community Initiative
Sandwell Homes – ALMO board games

Most Outstanding Residents
Roy and Jean Girdler – Wolverhampton Homes



The awards in full swing

NFA update

Enfield Homes became the 68th live ALMO in April 2008 while Blackpool Coastal Housing was the second ALMO in round 6 to successfully achieve a two-star inspection rating. Congratulations also go to Solihull Community Housing and Your Homes Newcastle – both were upgraded to three stars with excellent prospects on re-inspection. These results demonstrate how the sector remains dedicated to continuous improvement and the delivery of excellent services, even after Decent Homes funding has been obtained.

Meanwhile the ALMO sector has begun to spread its wings. A number of ALMOs have now obtained access to social housing grant, either directly or as partners with a housing association or developer, and so will build new homes for the first time in 2008. The first ALMOs have also obtained Housing Management Accreditation with the Housing Corporation and this will enable them to manage properties built or owned by housing associations. More ALMOs are expected to apply for development and management accreditation status and to bid for schemes under the Corporation's regular market engagement this year. ALMOs will also be able to apply for grant to help purchase new properties from house builders, for rent to social tenants.

The NFA has been working with TRANSACT, the national forum for financial inclusion, and other stakeholders across the social housing sector to produce two brochures designed to encourage more social landlords to get involved in financial inclusion work. The brochures highlight good practice across housing associations, ALMOs and local authorities and feature Golden Gates Housing, Derby Homes and East Durham Homes from the ALMO world.

Following on from the highly successful parliamentary reception in February, the March All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) meeting showcased innovative work by Sheffield Homes and Derby Homes to tackle long term unemployment and support young people at risk of offending. The July meeting and APPG AGM will discuss the future of the ALMO sector.

Nearly 300 people attended the NFA Annual Conference and AGM in York on 13 and 14 May. Delegates were treated to a topical series of plenaries and workshops from a wide range of speakers. The very successful NFA Awards ceremony at the conference dinner was a highlight. The NFA Annual Review 07/08, which looks at NFA activity over the year and includes an entry for every established ALMO, was published at the same time.

The NFA AGM, on 13 May, agreed to the incorporation of the NFA as a limited company with effect from 1 January 2009 and also approved the Memorandum and Articles, Standing Orders and Rules for Contracts. Subscriptions for 2009 were also agreed.

The NFA has been very busy actively lobbying MPs and Peers and working with other housing agencies on the provisions of the Housing and Regeneration Bill, which is expected to complete its passage through Parliament by the end of summer. The Bill mainly relates to the setting up of the Housing and Communities Agency (HCA) and the new social housing regulator, recently renamed the Tenant Services Authority.

The NFA has been arguing for:

- at least one third of the membership of the regulator to be tenants
- tenants to have access to relevant information which would enable them to compare the performance of their housing provider with others
- tenants to be able to change their managing organisation if it fails to provide an adequate service

A key issue in the current Bill is that it specifically excludes councils and ALMOs from the remit of the social housing regulator, although the government has stated its intention to roll out the regulator's remit at a later date. The NFA is part of the Cross-Domain Advisory Panel, chaired by Professor Ian Cole, which was tasked with considering how the regulation can be applied across all social housing. Following on from the Panel's recommendations, we expect the government to issue a further consultation paper in the summer and include provisions extending the regulator's powers to local authority landlords in the proposed Community Empowerment, Housing and Economic Regeneration Bill next autumn.

The Housing and Regeneration Bill also includes a clause enabling councils and ALMOs to move out of the subsidy regime, either for new build or for the whole stock, and this paves the way for self financing to be implemented. This will form part and parcel of the root and branch review of the housing revenue account subsidy system which is due to report to ministers next spring. This review, together with current and forthcoming legislation, will form a major part of the NFA work programme over the next year.

Paying the rent

Making ends meet is a concern that many of us share but it is a concern that may loom larger in the lives of council tenants than others.

Most council tenants earn modest incomes or depend on benefits to pay their bills. Some may have had difficult backgrounds or personal problems and this can make paying the rent an even greater challenge.

In recognition of such problems, an increasing number of ALMOs have begun to offer practical assistance and advice on money matters to residents facing eviction for non-payment of rent.

South Essex Homes is one such ALMO. It has begun an initiative with the Citizens Advice Bureau to reduce rent arrears and help residents in financial difficulty. The new project means that when tenants have been served a repossession notice, they will be offered independent housing and debt advice and any pending action will be suspended. They will also be given advice on other debts. The ALMO will work with the resident to maximise his or her income and help them to budget effectively.

Revenue Services Manager Simon Putt says tenants worried about debt should seek help as soon as possible. "It is really important we know if there is a problem before the situation spirals out of control, so they can receive the specialist advice and support they will need to help them resolve their difficulties. We want to sustain tenancies - eviction is really the last resort."

Both 2010 Rotherham and Rochdale Boroughwide Housing have already begun to benefit from similar schemes launched last year. 2010 Rotherham has seen the number of evictions drop from 110 in 2007 to 67 in the 12 months to April 2008. The ALMO's Housing Income Service staff now devote as much attention to debt prevention as they do to rent recovery. Housing Income Manager Simon Bell said: "Our arrears prevention work has resulted in not only a third fewer tenants being evicted for rent arrears, but our rent collection rate has improved for the second year running too. This is clearly a 'win, win' situation for 2010, Rotherham Borough Council and its tenants. The new way of working is actually saving money, creating more sustainable tenancies and generating a payment culture amongst tenants."

Meanwhile, Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH) has exceeded a rent collection target set by Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council. In 2007/8 RBH collected 97.84 per cent of rent due, against a target of 97.8 per cent.

Last year the ALMO responded to rising personal debt levels across the UK by employing a Benefit and Debt Advisor to help tenants in arrears, ensure they receive their full benefit entitlement and to provide general financial advice. As part of its developing approach to financial inclusion, RBH also recently teamed up with Moneyline Greater Manchester – a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) - to give Rochdale tenants access to affordable credit.

NEWS FLASH: NFA board member receives MBE



NFA Board Vice Chair Juliet Rawlings has been awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list.

Juliet has been Chair of the Kensington and Chelsea TMO Board since 2003 and has spoken at numerous local and national housing events across the country to explain and promote the ALMO option.

She said: "I'm completely stunned and deeply honoured to be awarded an MBE. I'm pleased that my work for Kensington and Chelsea TMO, and ALMOs nationally, has been recognised in this way. I particularly want to thank my family, friends and colleagues for their faith and support over the years."

Helen Evans, Chief Executive of the TMO, said: "We owe a great deal to Juliet who has dedicated herself to tenants' issues nationally and, in particular, the council residents of Kensington and Chelsea. She never fails to be positive and fully deserves this award for her commitment and tireless dedication to the principle of tenant involvement."

News round-up

TEA MOBILE!



The Tea Mobile!

Northwards Housing recently invited residents to meet staff for tea, biscuits and a chat in the 'Tea Mobile', a specially furnished 'moving living room'. Residents of the Moston area in north Manchester met Northwards staff in the Tea Mobile to discuss their ideas for improvements to the area.

Head of Neighbourhood Services Julie Wilson said: "We're always keen to get views from people in the area and we thought the Tea Mobile would not only be a great way of doing this but would also be a great opportunity for neighbours to catch up."

CANADIAN MAYOR VISITS DONCASTER

A Canadian Mayor has been on a fact-finding mission to Doncaster, to view the ways in which St Leger Homes manages housing stock.

Larry O'Connor, Mayor of the large township of Brock, Ontario, is Chairman of one of the country's biggest housing providers. He said: "It was great speaking to the tenants. I learned a lot on the visit and hope to present some of the ideas to our Board."

St Leger Homes Chief Executive Martin Musgrave added: "Larry wanted to see how we provide services to tenants. He was delighted with the work we do."

CANNABIS DEN

Hounslow Homes staff and residents recently helped local police uncover and close down a major cannabis farm. Three people were arrested when Police entered premises on a Hounslow estate, following information from residents.

"We'd like to thank all the residents who were able to provide Hounslow Homes and the Police with valuable information which led to these drug dens being discovered and closed down," said Chief Executive Bernadette O'Shea.

ONLY NATURAL

South Essex Homes recently introduced some of its most vulnerable and underprivileged residents to the joys of Nature. A group drawn from mental health support group Growing Together, the YMCA, the care leaving team and the local homeless hostels enjoyed a visit to the Meadowfield Nature Study Centre.

Andy Davies, 22, is a former resident of the homeless hostels. He said: "I have really enjoyed today. I have never been to a place like this before and didn't realise there was so much to learn."

Meanwhile, a visit to Willows Farm Village in Hertfordshire was the first day trip of the year for Brent Housing Partnership residents. BHP Managing Director Helen Evans said: "Getting away from London and escaping to the countryside allowed a lot of residents to get up close to animals they wouldn't see every day."



The South Essex Homes group at Meadowfield

Communities winning with Salix Homes

Salix Homes has **developed an innovative scheme** designed to promote closer ties between its staff and the communities around them: **WIN (Winning in Neighbourhood) Days**. Under the scheme, every member of staff is given six days of work time each year to undertake any form of voluntary work of direct benefit to the neighbourhoods of Central Salford.

Working closely with community groups and voluntary organisations, staff have already become enthusiastically involved in a host of voluntary projects, including school mentoring schemes, arts projects, road crossing patrols, gardening projects and community cafes.

WIN Day volunteers are already helping turn an area of wasteland next to a primary school into a sensory garden. Salix Homes staff and contractors turned out to begin work at St Peter's and St John's Primary School despite torrential rain. The students and teachers are already discussing how they will use the site as an area of quiet reflection and education. It will include a 'touch and feel area' to inspire creativity. WIN Days coordinator Kevin Turner said: "We're delighted that we're able to make a difference by helping to create an exciting area that will be enjoyed by so many children."

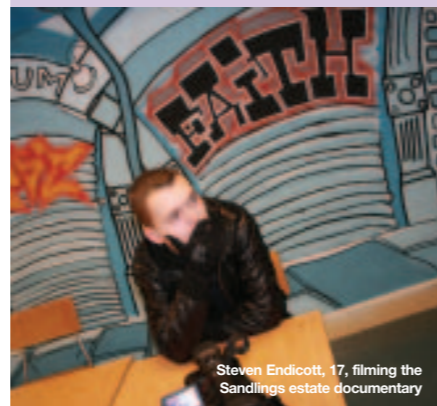
Housing Assistant Brenda Nolan has been using her WIN Days to help local community café Loaves and Fishes. She says: "I was really impressed with the services that they provide to people who are disadvantaged in

the Pendleton area. It was great to see people getting so well looked after and the range of activities that they provide is amazing."

Block Superintendent Graham Dobson has been devoting his volunteering time to Salford Talking News, a group which provides audio recordings to the visually impaired. He explains: "I was pleased to see that Salford Talking News were looking for assistance as I have been aware of their work for many years. I have several friends who are blind or partially-sighted and I know from them how much they value the service that Salford Talking News provides. I find it really fulfilling to be able to give a little time to help someone else."

"All these projects will help make communities in Central Salford better places to live and work," adds Director of Neighbourhood Services Chris Gibbins. "This exciting approach to improving and engaging with communities has been welcomed with open arms in Central Salford, with over 50 community groups and voluntary organisations now on board."

Life on the screen



Steven Endicott, 17, filming the Sandlings estate documentary

Homes for Haringey has encouraged young people living on four of its estates to express their views of life in the neighbourhood to camera.

The youngsters, all aged 11 to 21, produced documentary-style films about life on the Sandlings, Edgecot Grove, Coldfall and Northumberland Park estates. The ten-minute films, which received support from Neighbourhood Management Teams across the borough, were each screened at local venues.

Some of the young filmmakers cited a strong sense of community on their estates, a sense of 'sticking together' and of having a relationship with their neighbours, whilst others reported concerns about personal and community safety and the amount of leisure activities available.

Homes for Haringey has begun to consider the various issues raised, says Mike Jones, Chair of the Homes for Haringey Board. "We wanted another way of involving and capturing the views of the young people living on our estates. It has been a fun project and we will be working with the young people, parents and the agencies involved to address the issues young people have highlighted."

Meanwhile, Homes for Haringey has become the first housing organisation in the country to sign up to the WOW! Awards, the only national customer service award scheme.

This 'compliment' scheme offers members of the public the opportunity to nominate a team or member of staff for providing an excellent service. Anyone wishing to nominate can pick up a form from libraries, customer service centres, concierge suites and the Homes for Haringey website.



(Left to right) Tony Riley, Alan Brown, Kevin Turner & Paul Godiff help out at St Peter's and St Paul's

In the spotlight: Aire Valley Homes

Environmental issues have never been more prominent than they are today. Barely a day passes without another media story highlighting aspects of global warming, energy and efforts to tackle the global green agenda.

ALMOs have not been slow to incorporate environmental issues into their own service offerings, with many providing practical green assistance to low income families. Such initiatives can have a double benefit – teaching a tenant to be more efficient in their use of increasingly expensive energy is not only environmentally-friendly but can also help to tackle such pressing issues as fuel poverty.

Leeds ALMO Aire Valley Homes is one such green ALMO, having established an ambitious environmental agenda in a series of initiatives with regeneration charity the Groundwork Trust.

Earlier this year one such scheme, the John O'Gaunts Community Allotment Environment project, was selected from over 200 entries for the 2008 NFA Awards shortlist.

The project aims to improve the local environment, engage young people, forge inter-generational links and provide elderly people with healthy food.

Residents worked to transform derelict land and abandoned gardens into community allotments. The produce grown on these allotments is then distributed free of charge to elderly residents on the estate. Aire Valley Homes helped fund and implement the

project, while the allotments are now actively managed by local children and young people.

Work began with a special Environmental Week in February, during which the residents cleared land and planted crops, built a 20ft poly-tunnel and created scarecrows from scrap material.

More than 35 youngsters devoted their half-term holiday to the project and now contribute regularly, with staff from Aire Valley Homes and Groundwork on hand to advise and provide practical help. The first batch of locally-grown produce was delivered to residents in April.

Local resident Stuart Beaumont said: "We are looking to change attitudes. I come from a family where everything we ate we had grown, a valuable process young people often do not learn anymore."

Meanwhile Safer Stronger South and South East Leeds is a two-year partnership with Groundwork designed to deliver a progressive programme of environmental and social cohesion projects worth over £1million to council residents across south and east Leeds.

It aims to link physical improvements on Aire Valley Homes estates to the wider social and economic objectives of the area. The partnership will deliver a diverse range of objectives, all focused on enhancing the local area for residents. There will be projects designed to help cut crime and antisocial behavior while others will encourage local youngsters to reclaim and regenerate

wasteland, creating attractive new outdoor facilities and public open spaces.

The partnership has also created a specialist training programme for up to 20 residents, who will have access to certification, work experience and employment opportunities with the ALMO's construction partners.

Jason Kerry from Groundwork explains: "This project is the first of its kind and is an important vehicle to launch a broad spectrum of regeneration work to benefit south and east Leeds communities. Our ultimate aim is to ensure it makes a long-term difference to the quality of the local environment and the quality of life of the people who live within it. By encouraging residents to take ownership of the projects they take forward, we are creating a sustainable approach, rather than just a one-off."

One of the first fruits of the partnership is the innovative 'Green Doctor Warmer Living' project, which has been launched following a successful pilot scheme. The 'Green Doctor' visits ALMO tenants and residents, particularly the elderly, disabled, and those with young children, to discuss ways to reduce their household fuel bills and reduce their impact on the local environment.

The Green Doctor pilot scheme helped residents to save over £110 each year on their energy bills through the free fitting of such basic measures as reflective radiator panels and hot water tank jackets.



Children on the John O'Gaunts estate

Silver surfers

Modern technology moves at such a **rapid pace** that many of us have difficulty keeping up. Cutting edge gadgetry is obsolete a few months after purchase. The **Worldwide Web** became mainstream just ten years ago and now the modern world could not function without it.



(Front L-R) Residents Joan Cutmore, Janet Wickham and Phyllis Stevens with (back) GCH Head of Marketing and Communications Jenny Wyatt and Resident Involvement Officer Lyn Scudamore (Picture: Gloucestershire Media)

Inevitably some people, especially the elderly, get left behind. Lacking confidence and training, they struggle with even the most basic computer use. ALMOs, always people-centred organisations, have begun to respond to such needs with practical help and assistance.

Gloucester City Homes (GCH) hosted a free Silver Surfers Day event in May to introduce residents of its Sheltered Schemes to computers and use of the Internet.

The nine two-hour sessions, at different Schemes across the city, were an opportunity for residents to ask questions and receive basic advice and training on how to use the Internet. The sessions included visits to a range of websites, including the Gloucester City Homes website (www.gloscityhomes.co.uk), where participants could discover the online services available, such as ways to report a repair or pay rent online.

Reaction from the 35 residents who attended was unanimously positive. One said: "It was an excellent day. The lady who came was

wonderful, and helped me understand some of my difficulties with the Internet and a Word document that I had been struggling with. Thank you very much!"

Gloucester City Homes Chief Executive Ashley Green said: "Many older people are not sure where to begin and this event provided them with a platform to get started. People were amazed at how much they could do online and the possibilities it holds. We are now looking at organising further training opportunities for those residents who would like to develop their IT skills further."

Meanwhile, residents of the Thomas Wall Close sheltered housing scheme in Sutton have been enjoying a different kind of modern technology – the Nintendo Wii games console.

Staff from the Ecological BikeStreet youth project took the console with them on a visit to the scheme. Residents took it in turns to try the motion-sensing controller, going head-to-head with project staff in several games, including golf, tennis and ten-pin bowling.

Sutton Housing Partnership Neighbourhood Team Manager Susan Holbrook said: "We have had great fun with the residents. They were all really keen to get involved and it's been a terrific way of bridging the generation gap. We are always looking for different ways to help older people get involved in physical activity."

Resident Lily Hillier added: "This week I've been having a go at the tennis, last week it was bowling. I'd never heard of the Wii before, we certainly didn't have anything like this in my day! I've really enjoyed myself and it's a great way to have fun and keep fit".



Resident Lily Hillier enjoys a session on the Wii with Emma Eaton

North Manchester's got talent!



V-trix in action

Northwards Housing staged its very first International Food and Dance Festival in May.

This completely free festival, celebrating the diversity of communities in north Manchester, featured food, music and performances from across the UK and around the world.

Lining up alongside hip hop dancers, Broadway shows and a Hindi Dance troupe was 19 year old Sharlene from Bangladesh who performed a selection of her own songs to an enthusiastic crowd. Vietnamese martial arts performers V-Trix drew gasps from the crowd with a variety of spectacular moves, including somersaults, while the local Abraham Moss Theatre group treated the crowd to a preview of their up-coming performance of High School Musical.

Children, many with painted faces, were captivated by a magic show or danced to live music on a bouncy castle, while adults had beauty treatments, queued to be decorated with henna tattoos, or just enjoyed the food and music.

Resident Mohamed Khan said: "My children have been laughing, dancing and joining in with the fun all day...and so have I! The food from around the world is so tasty and the bands and dance acts – well, it's like watching *Britain's Got Talent!*"

Northwards Housing Board Chair Sue Ratchford added: "The day was a great success. The diversity of the visitors was extremely encouraging and will, I'm sure, encourage more people from ethnic minorities to get involved with Northwards and have a say in what is happening in their area."

The property ladder

During 2008 ALMOs across the country have continued to slowly but significantly expand their roles, from managing agents and service providers into **true housing organisations** which can both build and own property.



The newly refurbished Green Hill Apartments



Derby Homes Chair Dennis Rees at the official handover

A major milestone was reached earlier this year when Derby Homes become the very first ALMO to purchase and own property.

Working in partnership with the Derwent Community Team, the ALMO recently completed the purchase of five apartments in central Derby. These will be offered at affordable rents to single people and childless couples.

Green Hill Apartments, located in a converted Victorian building, were renovated by local people from the Derwent area as part of a training project by construction organisation Derwent Builds. Funding came from the European Social Fund and the Derwent Community Team, a local regeneration organisation.

"The properties have been totally refurbished and are fully fitted with appliances," said Shaun Bennett, Director of Regeneration and Investment at Derby Homes. "Four of the apartments will be for couples, and one will be for a single person. We're particularly pleased to be taking possession of properties that have been converted by local trainees."

The renovation project gave trainees a chance to work alongside construction professionals and local contractors to develop their skills, gain work experience and achieve vocational qualifications.

Rental income will be returned to the Derwent Community Team to develop and sustain projects within the area.

Peter Ballard is Chair of its management board. He said: "Our research has shown there is a severe shortage of this type of property in the Derwent area. The purchase will help fill that gap and provide long-term funding and benefits for residents."

Derby Homes Chief Executive Phil Davies added: "This purchase, together with our £5m new build programme, are extremely positive developments that will help secure the long-term future of Derby Homes."

Further north, Salford ALMO Salix Homes recently oversaw the successful completion of the first phase of a highly ambitious new build project.

A partnership with developer Countryside Properties and Contour Housing Group, the New Broughton development is a 15-year programme which will deliver 3,500 new homes and a full range of community facilities and services to create a mixed and sustainable community.

The first phase consists of over 400 new flats and houses, including 92 properties for social rent, the majority of which have helped to rehouse Salix Homes tenants affected by the regeneration work. It has been funded through the government's Housing Market Renewal (HMR) pathfinder regeneration programme, which Salix Homes is delivering on behalf of Salford City Council. The New Broughton development is designed to deliver

a mixed, tenure-neutral community in Lower Broughton, an area which has for many years been dominated by social rented stock.

As well as providing homes for existing residents, the development has sought to attract new owner occupiers into the area.

Salix Homes Head of Regeneration Services, Reuban Flynn, said: "With increasing numbers of ALMOs now examining opportunities to regenerate estates and neighbourhoods through remodelling, demolition and new build, the experience of the Salix Homes HMR team could prove invaluable in leading the way for regeneration ALMOs."

Salix Homes has now begun the consultation process for the next phases of the development, with support from Salford City Council, Countryside Properties and housing association partners.



An artist's impression of the New Broughton development